

# MINUTES

**Fourth Quarterly Meeting of the  
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION  
Held, pursuant to notice  
Friday, November 22, 2002 — 10:00 AM  
Central Office Headquarters — 1719 Southridge Drive  
Jefferson City, MO**

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. New Commissioner Emmett Fairfax introduced by Chairman Niewoehner
- C. Roll Call  
In attendance: **Chairman, Carl Niewoehner, Member Bernadette Miller, Member Emmett Fairfax, and Member Donald Gralike.**  
Excused absence: **Member Reginald Bassa**
- D. Introductions  
Guests and staff present.
  - 1. Guests: **Andy Scott**, National Military Education and Heritage Center; **Col. Jerry Brown**, Wentworth Military Academy Project Heritage; **Jim Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Stephen Gaither**, Public Affairs Office Columbia VA Hospital; **Gary Williams**, Director Regional Office Dept. of Veterans Affairs; **Ralph Skelly**, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Dept. MO; **Matt Sweetwood**, OA Budget and Planning; **Dan Follette**, DPS General Council; **Larry Daniels**, DAV, Dept of MO; **Tom Granger**, AFSCME MO Council #72;
  - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Julie Miller**, Chief Accountant; **Jess Rasmussen**, Lead Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Mike Robbins**, Director Springfield Cemetery; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery; **Jodella Gregory**, CNA Mt. Vernon Veterans Home; **Tara Bowler**, NA II Warrensburg Veterans Home
- E. Approval of August 12, 2002 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded.

## **II. NEW BUSINESS:**

Military Honors Program – Jim Whitfield, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program, announced National Commander of the American Legion, Ron Conley visited the Mexico Veterans Home and also toured the John J. Cochran and Truman VA Medical Centers. Reported to the Commission on the MVC Foundation Golf Tournament budget of \$2,637.42 cleared. Reported that the Foundation is a Non-for-Profit Corp by the State of MO and has been approved by IRS as a 501(c)(3) Corporation. The Foundation is sponsoring a Christmas Luncheon at MVC for the Commission and central office staff on December 19, 2002.

Gary Williams, Director St. Louis Regional Office Dept. Veterans Affairs reported that backlog in the St. Louis Regional Office is declining. He verified an increase in VA claims over the last year. Total benefits received by veterans increases month to month. He noted that Secretary Principi indicated that by end of FY 2003 there will be 250,000 claims pending nationally of which 5,500 is MO claims pending. He expressed his appreciation of the hard work the Commission and Service Organizations have done in increasing earned VA benefits. Concurrent Receipt- the House and Senate has passed a law entitling military retirees to receiving both disability compensation and retirement pay.

Colonel Wayne Medley, MO Military Funeral Honors Program demonstrated to the Commission a new device being tested by the Honors Program that would replace a live bugler playing Taps with a device placed in the trumpet that has an electronic version of Taps. This device currently cost \$500.00 per trumpet but expects the cost to decrease after production begins. Colonel Medley informed the Commission that 21,666 services have been coordinated. Over the past 12 months 7,759 ceremonies have been performed. Two new honors teams have been added and should be ready by January in Joplin and Poplar Bluff.

Stephen Gaither, Public Affairs Office Columbia VA Hospital reported on CARES Update (Capital Assets Realignment for Enhanced Services). He briefly explained the 9 steps of the program and ask for feedback from stakeholders in each market area. In the spring there will be a 60 day comment period for the whole system.

## **III. OLD BUSINESS:**

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

**Staff Changes:** Terry McAdams joined the Commission Central Office in September. He is the Director of Workforce Development and will be assessing

training needs and identifying hiring practices. His background is in personnel and labor relations.

Kim Harris accepted the Director of Operations of Home Program effective November 1 and will also continue to deal with personnel issues.

Jill Talken will function as Executive Secretary/Office Manager. Her additional duties will include tracking legislation and serving as VBATF Coordinator.

Ralph Durnbaugh title is changed to Director of Planning. He will assist with the long range planning for the STV Program and VBATF.

Sharon Keith has assumed the position of Director Service to Veterans Program effective July.

**Budget:** FY2004 state income no improvements.

**Counterpart Meeting:** Early November the Annual Counterpart Meeting was held in Branson. Homes, Cemetery and STV were those in attendance. This years meeting brought all together to attempt to raise veterans awareness. The meeting was a valuable training course.

**STV Meetings:** STV Regional meetings are currently happening across the state and personnel from other MVC Programs have been available to learn more about all programs.

**Cemetery Feasibility Study:** Three additional Cemeteries have been requested for Fort Leonard Wood, St. Louis and Kansas City area. By January 1 preliminary study should be completed. We have been advised Jefferson Barracks has received a contract award of additional land, which will extend the life of the cemetery to 2012-2015. Another possible land addition may be included to add 2015-2022 life expectancy. Leavenworth Cemetery has also acquired additional land to extend to 2025-2030. Depending on this evaluation we may only need to continue with Fort Leonard Wood.

**Annual Report:** A draft of the MVC Annual Report was distributed to the Commission members. Final print should be distributed by January. This years focus was on the veterans we serve and the employees who do that work.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Homes Program** – Reported on Comparison of State and MVC Quality Indicators of FY02 (attachment). Quality indicator comparison clearly indicates MO far exceeds National and State levels. The Homes depend on Assistance Leagues and Service Organizations as volunteers. A total of 104,681 hours were

volunteered last year and \$680,070 cash donations from the Assistance Leagues were received.

Construction Update: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Construction** – Report Update November 22, 2002, prepared by Tim Norton was handed out. (attachment) Timeline of construction projects going as planned.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Sharon Keith displayed to the Commission a map outlining the STV regions, district offices and service officers field locations. This map also indicates the travel frequency to each field office. Of the 114 counties in MO, STV officers helping to assist veterans and dependants in filing of VA benefits represent 110 counties.

Due to budget constraints this year no statewide training conference will be held. Ms Keith hopes that one can be held next year. This year regional meetings were held in St. Louis, Farmington, Cameron, Mexico and Springfield. A representative from the Homes and Cemetery Programs was in attendance.

Cemeteries: Jess Rasmussen, Lead Cemetery Director

**Cemeteries Program** – Jess Rasmussen, Lead Cemetery Director reported Springfield Cemetery has completed 948 burials and have done 1640 pre-eligibility certifications of which they have buried 198. Overall cremation rate is 29%. Higginsville Cemetery completed 266 burials and 1311 pre-eligibility certifications. Higginsville has a 35% cremation rate. Jacksonville Cemetery has 98 pre-registrations and Bloomfield Cemetery has 380.

Working on erosion control at the Higginsville and Springfield cemeteries and a stone drinking fountain was installed at the Higginsville Cemetery.

Adding honors guard room and heated wash bay at Higginsville and Springfield.

Noted the MVC Website has valuable information and has helped to assist with questions.

Noted that Customer Service at MO State Veterans Cemeteries is great. Other states have contacted MO to come and visit and look at what is being done.

VSO Grants: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Veteran Service Organization Grants Program** – Reported on the following (attachments):

- 1) Halted decline in Service officers. Has allowed an increase overall providing additional coverage in south central Missouri, as well as adding a VVA Service Officer in St. Louis.
- 2) Increase in claims statewide. Range has been 15% - 25% in most reports. The attached report shows a 23.7% comp claims increase for Missouri for FY 2001 to FY 2002. This compares with a 6.6% increase nationwide (see attachment).
- 3) Grant program has supported statewide advertising campaign by two Service Organizations on veterans benefits.

Memorial Grants: Ron Taylor, Associate Director

**Memorial Grants Program** – Reported on the following (attachments):

The Committee recommends approval of the payment of \$300,000 to the Educational Center and Museum in Lexington. This will complete payment of the \$1,500,000 grant approved by the Commission. Also recommend a letter to the Commissioners indicating continued support of project.

We still have 3 projects not yet completed where funds have not been transferred.

- 1) St. Joseph \$24,900 (not ready at this time)
- 2) St. Louis Soldiers Memorial \$150,300 (out for bid on second half of project. Should have cost for project before January meeting).
- 3) Independence Memorial Hall \$306,000 (project completed, will have final cost within 30-60 days).

Until these are completed we will not be certain if additional funds are available. Consequently the Committee recommends postponing decisions on the other four applications (Graceland, Clay County, Sedalia and Poplar Bluff).

Andy Scott, National Military Education and Heritage Center gave a presentation update to the Commission on the money received so far for the grant project and described the projects contributions success.

Col. Jerry Brown, Wentworth Military Academy Project Heritage Center on behalf of Governor Roger Wilson who was unable to attend, his involvement with

the planners and feels this project is valuable. They also expressed interest in helping the Commission as well with raising awareness.

Ron Taylor expressed his appreciation with National Military Education and Heritage Center on the assistance of the Supermarket support.

Commissioner Gralike made a motion to accept the Committees recommendation to approve the last \$300,000 to Lexington and declaration of support for project. Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. By voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

**VBATF** – Ralph Durnbaugh updated the Commission on the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. Kansas City Supermarket reached 296 veterans. The next Supermarket is scheduled for December 7 at KCI Expo Center. Mr. Durnbaugh met with John Eckhoff, Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services and Chairman of the Benefits Supermarkets to establish criteria in selecting sites for 2003 Supermarkets. He expressed interest in reaching all areas requested. The first Supermarket next year will be in March in the Joplin area. A print out of Compensation Cases 2002 Missouri, County Data was distributed. This data assist in determining sites for future Supermarkets. Examples of criteria to be met are: community support, size of facilities and etc.

Around Veterans Day DAV and VFW promoted a valuable advertising campaign.

800# continue to be a success especially influenced by media coverage for Supermarkets. Since the 800# was installed MVC has received over 2,000 calls.

VBATF is continuing to work on outreach program. Letters mailed out contacting Mayors and Ministers in MO asking to support veteran activities in their communities and information on the 800# and MVC website. Also suggested guidelines to establish a Mayor's Veterans Advisory Group was mailed to those expressing an interest.

St. Louis Regional VA Office shows a 23.7% increase in claims, the national average is 6.6%. The task force will continue to work on ways to communicate our message. In FY 2001 \$449 million was paid out in compensation a large jump from FY 2000. Mr. Durnbaugh encourage the Commission to review the statistics provided to them on compensation and pension cases listed by county.

Chairman Niewoehner expressed concern about the new legislators not educated in veterans issues. Mr. Niewoehner wrote a letter to the Columbia Tribune recently in reference to the article done on the MO Wall of Valor notifying them that the Veterans Commission contributed grant money from the Memorial Grant Program to assist in the funding. The Commission was not listed as being a contributor to the memorial.

Mr. Niewoehner reported on the success on the CBOC's. Ron Taylor indicated an increase in claims for compensation and pension through the contact of the Veteran Service Officers located at the CBOC's.

Mr. Niewoehner reported from an article on Veterans Healthcare cost.

Hal Dulle, Assistant Director briefed to the Commission on University of Missouri Senior Level Media Class has agreed to evaluate and research VBATF issues and outreach program and try to develop a media campaign for \$750.

Hal Dulle thanked DAV for being a major contributor to the MVC Foundation.

Hal Dulle also thanked MVC staff and Jill Talken for their work on the golf tournament. Plans are underway for next years tournament.

Hal Dulle reported the Commissioners that the Legislative Tour is scheduled for December 12 at the St. Louis Veterans Home at 2:30 –3:30 p.m. There are 90 new legislators that will be touring our facility. We will show a PowerPoint presentation along with the tour. On December 9<sup>th</sup> the Legislators will have a drive through tour of the Springfield Cemetery.

Mr. Dulle expressed interest in hosting an "Open House" the evening prior to "Veterans Appreciation Day" at the Capitol. Hal will continue to work on this. Invitations would go out to Legislators and staff. Possible funding through MVC Foundation.

#### **IV. OTHER BUSINESS:**

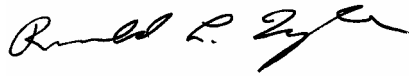
Ron Taylor noted that a meeting for the Commissioners to meet with the Governor is being planned to happen prior to legislative session. He will notify Commissioners when date is set.

Missouri Veterans Commission Formula for Resident Rates was discussed. State statute allows the Executive Director to determine the amount paid with the approval of the Commission. Based on increased cost of operating Homes it was recommended to increase the resident rate by \$95 per month. Beginning January 1, 2003 the maximum resident rate will go from \$1,348 per month to \$1,443 per month. The Commission will provide a list of other state rates to the Commissioners. Commissioner Fairfax made a motion to accept increase. Commissioner Gralike seconded the motion. By voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Chairman Niewoehner announced the next Commission meeting is tentatively set for Tuesday, January 21st at 10:00- 12:00 at MVC Headquarters pending notification of “Veterans Appreciation Day” at the Capitol Building. Members will be notified.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald L. Taylor", written in a cursive style.

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Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary